

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Age of Gracious Living

During the Spanish fete held in Santa Barbara early this month, there was a great deal written about the history of Senor Don Jose Andres Sepulveda, the founder of a great family in Alta California. The Senor was also remembered in much of the publicity surrounding the recent Boy Scout Jamboree which was held on the huge Irvine ranch in Orange County. The rancho of Senor Don Jose was added to what is now the Irvine ranch in May of 1853.

The ever-present enchantment of Hispanic California has again urged us to repeat here some of the stories recalled by a distinguished resident of Santa Barbara, Senora Dona Sally Hilliard Polk de Armsby, a descendant of the Sepulveda family as well as of such illustrious old families as De Redondo, Avila, Alvarado, Lanfranco, Cota, Gutierrez, Pantoja, Uribe, all names well known in Monterey.

Two of Mrs. Armsby's antecedents witnessed the historic founding of the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara in 1728. Several of her ancestors came to this land with Portola's pioneer expedition in 1769. Her great-great grandmother Gutierrez was confirmed at San Diego Mission by Father Junipero Serra.

Senor Don Francisco Xavier Sepulveda escorted in 1781, Los Pobladores or first settlers to found el Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles do Porciuncula (Los Angeles). Today the name of Sepulveda repeatedly appears in the streets and topography of this State.

In an interview, written at the time of the Santa Barbara festival, Mrs. Armsby told how the family of Sepulveda journeyed to Santa Barbara and other fiestas, as told to her by her mother Ismaela Marta Lanfranco de Polk, who lived to be 93.

"The Sepulvedas came by oxcart; the women and children in one and their clothing, jewels and women servants in another. A guard of 10 or 12 men on horseback rode beside the screeching carretas. Ranchos were visited on the way but the trip was comfortable as las senoras reclined on soft cushions and one traveled only during the pleasant summer months, for no Californian would dream of going out—not even to a party—in the rain!"

Time passed and one day in those cherished yesterdays, a handsome young Italian Juan Tomas Lanfranco, met and fell in love with beautiful Petra Dolores del Pilar, the daughter of Don Jose Loreta Sepulveda of Rancho Los Palos Verdes, a principality of over 31,000 acres reaching from Wilmington to Redondo. The beautiful Petra became the grandmother of Mrs. Armsby. One of the Lanfranco sisters still lives, Amenaída Rafaela Lanfranco, aged 93, now Mrs. Walter Svitt Moore of Los Angeles.

The courtship of Petra Dolores and the young Italian, who is said to have been a prince, was delayed but a happy one. Two years he had to wait for his bride to reach her 16th year as required by her father. The time he spent well, building his bride a home in Los Angeles, on La Calle Principal, now Main Street, near the old plaza church, ordering furniture, silver, paintings even a sewing machine from his native Italy.

It is said that the bride's trousseau came from China and Spain, as was the custom in those days. Her Wedding gown was of pale satin with pink rose buds; then for each day of the week's festivities she wore an elaborate gown of a favorite colored satin brocade.

Lanfranco, the dutiful head of his house, deciphered the instructions for the sewing machine and taught the seamstresses how to sew, for he himself ordered entire bolts of cloth so that his every increasing family would have dresses alike. Lanfranco knew thoroughly how to read and write in six languages.

(To Be Continued)